

Check with the City Clerk to learn council procedures.

Attend city council meetings to see how they work. When you are ready to speak, follow the procedures, get on the agenda (which can take months), and be patient if you get bumped for more urgent business.

There was no time for us for two consecutive meetings. We understood the council’s need to put us off to another meeting, and let’s face it: ending corporate personhood is important, but not an emergency.

Be prepared for surprises.

We had been told that each speaker would have three minutes to speak before the City Council. We divided up what we had to say so that we could convey all our points by taking turns. But at the meeting where we spoke, there were so many who wanted to speak that we had only two minutes each.

Be aware of the sunshine laws that in many states keep elected officials from discussing issues outside of a session.

You can talk to them, but they may not be able to respond or discuss the topic with another councilperson.

In California, we have the Brown Act. Its purpose is to shine light on public decisions and keep backroom deals from happening. But it also has the effect of making simple communication between elected official and constituent rather awkward. For example, when we were rewriting the resolution, only one councilperson was allowed to be there, and we all just guessed what the others would accept. I think we went too soft on the wording because it passed 4 to 1.

Gather e-mail addresses and phone numbers from supporters.

Do this so you can mobilize them to come to city council meetings to talk and then to be in the audience on the day of the vote.

**4
GAIN PUBLICITY AND SUPPORT**

Set up appointments with media people.

Do this early on to let them know what you are up to. Give them a press kit that contains background materials and contact information.

Get reporters interested in your campaign.

Contact as many as possible and keep them in the loop. It can be “their” story. Remember, the more you write *for* them, the easier it is for them.

Set up appointments with people in elected office.

Contact city council members, county supervisor, state and federal congresspeople, and so on early on to let them know about your campaign. Give them background materials and contact information. Ask for an endorsement.

Start early to gather letters of support.

Contact prominent citizens and get permission to their letters in the paper and use them in your materials. Ask the writers to address them to your city council, but mail them to you so the campaign can copy them for various uses.

It was hard to get letters of support. Even folks who were really on our side couldn’t get around to writing a letter. Sometimes I would just stand in their office and wait as they wrote. Some asked me what they should write, so it’s good to have ideas to offer. For example, a lawyer might write about the legal aspects, or a clergyman may feel more comfortable writing about how corporations have no soul.

Distribute petitions.

We placed copies of our resolution at places around town, and asked citizens to sign on to show their support.

Keep your campaign in the papers.

Send notices of your events, letters to the editor, cartoons, and so on. We had a big fight in the letter column of our local paper. That interested people and got them talking about corporate personhood.

**5
WRITE THE RESOLUTION**

When you begin to write your resolution and other materials use the language of democracy. Citizens have the right to make decisions about the status of corporations and what they can and cannot do.

Be ready to defend your wording of the resolution.

Once you present the resolution, city council members can rewrite it. Try to get involved in this process, or you may not recognize what they finally pass.

Individual council members had trouble with certain parts of our resolution: all five wanted different things taken out. The resolution was tabled and referred to committee for a rewrite. We were able to get two people on the committee to help with this. The council was ready to pass something critical of corporations, but was more interested in something like three strikes for bad corporations or a campaign finance resolution. We had to keep them on the personhood track.

Ask for help.

We got lots of help from the **Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy** (POCLAD) and the **Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund** (CELDF). Now the Abolish Corporate Personhood campaign of the **Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom** (WILPF) stands ready to provide assistance and advice on resolution campaigns. See the back of this brochure for contact information. *Good luck!*

Share your experiences.

These tips were compiled by Jan Edwards, a Point Arena campaign member. Please tell us your stories so we can update these tips as the movement gains experience. Contact Jan Edwards at 707/882-1818 or janedwards@mcn.org

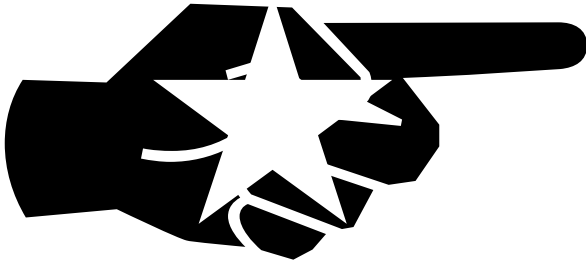
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Since 1915, WILPF has been working for equality of all people in a world free of racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, and war; building peace through world disarmament; and changing government priorities to meet human needs.

Abolish Corporate Personhood is a national action of WILPF, part of our Challenge Corporate Power, Assert the People’s Rights campaign. For more information on our campaign study groups and organizing materials, visit the WILPF website, call the Philadelphia office, or contact your local WILPF branch

ABOLISH CORPORATE PERSONHOOD

**TIPS ON
PASSING A
RESOLUTION
THAT ABOLISHES
CORPORATE
PERSONHOOD**



In 2000, after a six-month campaign by activists, the City Council of Point Arena, California, passed a resolution supporting the view that the word “person” does not apply to corporations. To help other communities, we have used the Point Arena experience to generate guidelines for mounting a successful campaign.

Getting Started

Decide what you want to accomplish.

What is your goal? Is it to get a resolution passed? To educate your community? Remember that your work is about democracy and democratic conversation. If your resolution loses, but you made a good case, this is a win as well.

Assess your readiness for the game of politics.

Are you ready to get involved in the political process? It is not enough to be knowledgeable about corporate personhood and why it should be abolished; you need to be credible.

Our group had political capital because we all were active in our community in various ways: our members included a lawyer, whose wife was the town’s only doctor; a school board member; several teachers; members of nonprofit arts and environmental groups; and small business people.

I urge folks to view their city council members as allies and treat them as such. We were friends with several folks on the council, so it was easy for us to feel this way. The opponents—some unexpected—of our resolution got very angry and even threatened the council. This antagonized the council members.

Determine your group’s skills or expertise.

What talents and skills do the members of your campaign group possess? What is lacking? Are there other allies you can invite to help fill any gaps? It was very helpful to have a lawyer in the core group and others who were comfortable reading legal documents. We had good organizers, writers, public relations experts, and those who put up flyers. There is much to be done on a campaign such as this.

Seek advice from local activists.

Learn from people who have passed other resolutions. What strategy should you pursue? What considerations need to be taken into account? How do you measure the level of support you have gained?

Design the campaign.

How will you proceed? What is your time frame? Are there upcoming events in the area that would be good to coordinate with or to avoid?

The Point Arena campaign took about six months. Toward the end we felt rushed but could tell the community interest was at a peak—the paper was full of letters, folks were talking about the issue—and we wanted to go to the City Council while the energy was high and before another issue came along.

ABOLISH CORPORATE PERSONHOOD!

Do you want to do outreach first to form a larger and varied core group and then write the resolution? Or do you want to write with a smaller group and get folks to sign on to a completed resolution?

We wrote first, with our core group formed of people already aware of the issues. We had a lot of learning and research to do, and these people were really committed. When trying to write, the larger the group of people, the harder. But now there are some model resolutions to get started, so writing might not be so difficult.

Mounting the Campaign

1

KEEP YOUR GOALS IN MIND

Aim to convince people that

1. Corporate personhood was wrongly given.
2. Corporate personhood undermines democracy and harms society and the environment.
3. Corporate personhood must be abolished.
4. Local governments have the democratic right to address this issue.

We spent the most energy on number 1, less on 2, and still less on 3. We realized too late that we hardly made the case at all for number 4. City council members were never convinced that they had the right and duty to confront corporate personhood. If we were to do it again, we would address sovereignty—the issue of who holds power and authority—at each and every opportunity.

2

EDUCATE YOUR COMMUNITY

Have town meetings and debates.

Invite speakers to explain corporate personhood. We planned an educational town meeting and invited an expert on corporate personhood to speak. Be careful to choose a real expert on this subject, or you may be better off addressing the meeting yourself.

Personally talk to as many people as possible.

Get invited to speak to civic groups, schools, and so on.

Learn to explain corporate personhood in one minute.

Draw up a list of talking points and good local examples.

Research your town history to find if there was ever harm caused by a corporation exercising its “rights as a person.” Or tie corporate personhood to a current local issue.

Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- Why are you doing this?
- What does it have to do with this town?
- What will be the effect of the resolution?
- Will the town get sued?
- Why punish all corporations? Why not just “bad” ones?
- What about non-profit corporations?
- Why not aim to pass a law?
- Don’t corporations deserve equal protection under the law?
- Why not go after limited liability or charter revocation or shareholder supremacy?-

Know the difference between personhood and limited liability.

This is a point of major confusion and why most people think they should be against abolishing corporate personhood.

Be aware that groups may feel threatened.

Some small businesses, religious groups, nonprofit organizations, and the city itself are likely to be corporations and so may feel threatened. Early in your campaign, make a point of helping them understand why you are campaigning against corporate personhood.

Turn your opponents into a resource and opportunity.

Early on I began inviting possible allies to join with us. Several were ready to come on board, but one locally prominent environmentalist was very much against what we were doing, and he scared off some of the others. But on the plus side, he got us to study hard and check out everything for ourselves, not just take the word of our advisors from POCLAD and other organizations.

As a consequence, we were sure that what we were saying and doing was right.

Keep returning to the issue of democracy.

Your concern is not fairness for corporations but fairness for people.

Make a lot of noise.

The publicity and discussion generated by the personhood issue moves the campaign ahead.

3

WORK WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Read your city charter to find out what is possible.

Many cities allow citizens to amend their charters. If your aim is to pass a resolution through the city council, remember that through your own campaign you are trying to provide a model of how a representative democracy can and should work.

Get the City Attorney on board.

At the least, provide lots of notice so he or she can be prepared. Our city attorney said that although he was sympathetic to our issue, it was his sworn duty to advise the council that passing an ordinance to outlaw corporate personhood was unconstitutional and that they must be very careful not to overstep their authority or they could get sued. By asking for a resolution instead of an ordinance, we allowed the council to state their opinion without the possibility of a lawsuit.

Educate city councilmembers about the issue.

They probably have never heard of corporate personhood before, and the five minutes or less you have to speak at a council meeting won’t be enough. We arranged our town meeting at a time they all could come, and four of the five did. These were the folks who voted yes. We also prepared information packets for council members and made extras for the city attorney, city clerk, press, and others. These packets contained our resolution, a booklet on corporate personhood, letters of support, petitions, and the tape of a local radio show on corporate personhood.